

The Ethnic Dimensions: Bringing Ethnic Divisions and Conflict to the Center of Social Movements Theory

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NOTE: Slide numbers refer to the file Oliver_The_Ethnic_Dimension_May2012.pptx. The talk I gave was image-centric. I had a lot of fun developing images to convey my ideas, although some of them were better than others. I personally think the talk is more fun in pictures and have posted the slides on my web site. Only a few of them are used here to illustrate the ideas. This version of the paper is a text write-up of that talk that is not yet bothering with niceties like references to other people's scholarship, although my thinking is deeply influenced by not only my long-term engagement with social movement literature but the huge literatures on ethnic conflict and the social construction of race. I am interested in commentary on the ideas but please write to me at oliver@ssc.wisc.edu to ask for an updated version and (hopefully) publication information before citing.

The thesis of this paper is that ethnic divisions and conflict need to be brought to the center of social movement theory. I mean this in two different ways. First, ethnicity as we usually think of it affects everything about a social movement. Whether a movement is drawn from an ethnic majority or an ethnic minority affects its mobilization, likelihood of repression, connections with other movements, and intra-movement dynamics. Movements by and for majorities are different from movements by and for minorities. Secondly, I mean that all movements always have ethnic dimensions. The essential features of ethnic groups define abstract dimensions which are useful for analyzing any movement, including those that would not normally be thought of as "ethnic." These abstract ethnic dimensions are the vertical dimensions of power, resources, and dominance/subordination; the horizontal or spatial dimensions of network connections; and the temporal dimensions of intergenerational transmission. Movement carriers that exhibit network cliquing from the larger society and intergenerational transmission have an "ethnic" character, even if they are not ethnic groups in the usual meaning of the word. Paying attention to these analytic dimensions provides tools for understanding the problem of movement content: why is it that groups in similar material conditions may come to advocate radically different policies?

These ideas have two points of origin. The first is my ongoing work in analyzing and speaking about racial disparities in incarceration, which led me into the matter of minorities and repression and a critique of the standard formulation of the problem of backlash, as well as into thinking about the properties of the movement against these disparities. The second is a general social movement scholar's awareness of the difference between middle class movements and movement by oppressed people. My thinking about these issues is heavily influenced by Morris and Braine's 2001 essay "Social Movements and Oppositional Consciousness." My attempt to theorize the different dimensions of ethnicity flowed

directly from both appreciating their argument and criticizing them for treating race and gender as analytically similar axes of domination.

This paper recapitulates my own intellectual development. After a brief detour into the concepts of race and ethnicity, I discuss how the problem of repression and backlash can be understood in ethnic terms. I expand on this point and argue that the ethnic divisions and the ethnic character of a movement are central to understanding movement dynamics and that all movements may be classified by their ethnic character. I sketch an empirical typology of movements based on their ethnic character. In the second major section of the paper, I bring that insight into dialog with Morris and Braine's ideas about the difference among movements, and develop the idea of ethnicity as a network integration dimension that is separable from although intertwined with axes of domination. The third section of the paper pulls intergenerational transmission into the story and provides a brief exegesis on the social/political construction of ethnicity/race across time. I then argue that these abstract processes may also help to illuminate the formation of political subcultures and universes of discourse that underlie social movements and that this abstract understanding of ethnicity may provide a way of theorizing the problem of movement content. I thus conclude that the ethnic dimensions are central to understanding all social movements.

A Note on Concepts of Race and Ethnicity

In this paper I am using the terms race and ethnicity interchangeably and loosely. I believe this is actually the correct way to use these terms, but providing a scholarly justification for this belief is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, let me sketch the outlines of this argument. The term race refers to groups that are socially defined as being physically distinct. The term ethnicity refers to groups that are socially defined as being culturally distinct. Both are descent groups: one inherits either race or ethnicity from one's parents. Culture is learned through socialization, and a child will learn the culture where it is reared, regardless of biological ancestry. People who are not physically distinct can pass into the larger population through acculturation, while the physical distinctness that marks race can lead to continued treatment as a minority even for a fully acculturated person. So race and ethnicity are not the same and can have quite different dynamics. In particular, racial minorities in the United States have had markedly different experiences from European ethnic minorities.

Nevertheless, the distinctions between race and ethnicity blur and even break down in everyday practice. Scholars of race have well documented the ways in which the definitions of racial categories vary between places and have changed over time. Because both race and ethnicity are descent groups, they overlap heavily in practice: people of different socially-defined races do tend to have different cultures, and people of different cultures tend to form the relatively distinct breeding populations that are the biological underpinnings of race. Although in a racially-stratified society like the United States, the markers that are used to distinguish races are seen as obvious and natural, race as it is used in practice is socially-constructed and always intertwined with culture. Practical definitions of race always include cultural markers such as language or behavior. People in a society learn what physical and cultural markers distinguish the socially-salient groups in that society, and much of this learning is unconscious. For example, although skin color is thought to be the main racial marker, the different

“races” in the United States actually overlap greatly in skin color, but residents of the United States readily make racial classifications anyway based on a host of physical and cultural traits.

Similarly, the definitions of “ethnic” boundaries are blurred and fluid. There are always local and subcultural variations within ethnic groups, but only some of them are socially salient in a given society. Religion is sometimes ethnic, in the sense that it defines descent groups with distinct cultural practices. In some societies, religious affiliation forms a central ethnic boundary, while it is nearly irrelevant in others. Groups that speak different languages are generally seen as ethnically different, but the extent to which dialects and accents are treated as socially-salient ethnic boundaries varies tremendously from place to place and era to era.

It is also important to stress that ethnic minority groups are extremely diverse in their actual structural, economic and political positions within larger societies. The only clear unifying feature is that they are not ethnic majorities. They differ in size, from tiny proportions of a larger population to a substantial fraction. Some are overwhelmingly poor, others are not. Some are geographically isolated, others live intermingled with others. Minorities that are the products of conquest on their own land are different from those created by forced migration (e.g. slavery) or voluntary migration. Minorities differ markedly in the extent to which they have experienced a history of violent suppression, have distinctive language or culture, are geographically relatively integrated or relatively segregated from other populations, have their own territory, or have clear-cut and strong ethnic/racial identities. They vary in their citizenship status. Ethnic/racial minorities are subject to widely different policy regimes of varying degrees of oppressiveness including genocide, forced relocation or segregation, social and ritual domination, forced assimilation and cultural destruction, as well as cultural accommodation, multiculturalism, and relatively non-coercive integrationist policies. The character of ethnic/racial movements is necessarily developed in interaction with the policies of the majority regimes and politics. Nevertheless, despite the extreme diversity among minority groups, the contrast with majorities remains analytically important.

The Matter of Repression

A central theoretical problematic of repression in social movements is the problem of backlash. Sometimes repression quells protest and sometimes repression fuels protest. On the one hand, repression works to suppress dissent. On the other hand, repression increases grievance and may thus provoke further dissent. Lots of ink has been spilled to document these dueling effects of repression on protest. Very little of it has engaged with what seems to me to be the central factor that can explain these different responses, to wit the relation between those repressed and the larger population. Grappling with the empirical patterns of Black incarceration has led me to re-think the problem of backlash and to argue that it can only be understood by analyzing the relation between the targets of oppression and the larger society, a relation I am now calling the “ethnic dimension.”

Repression of Minorities

Elsewhere, I’ve presented the argument that mass incarceration needs to be understood through a lens of repression. After 50 years of relative stability in incarceration rates, from 1970 the US experienced a mass incarceration boom. Whites as well as Blacks and Hispanics experienced increased incarceration,

but Black rates increased more rapidly than White (especially after 1980) and by the late 1990s, Black incarceration rates were at astronomical levels. This acceleration in first policing and then imprisonment occurred in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, the Black urban riots, and the disruptions and turmoil of the anti-war movement. Evidence from the end of the 1960s is that the phrase “violence in the streets” conflated riots and ordinary crime and that the coercive apparatus of policing and social control was ramped up to deal with the twin problems of high ordinary crime rates (by historical standards) and disruptive political movements. This in many ways recapitulates the 19th century history of the formation of professional police departments, which arose in similar circumstances and were backed by a coalition of elites fearing urban riots and rebellions and middle class people fearing property crime and theft-oriented assaults.

The criminology literature has long viewed policing as linked to both class and ethnic domination. Minorities are often subject to intense repression, and that repression often works to prevent political mobilization against the repression itself. The repressive effects of repression can be seen in the limited responses to mass incarceration. Although there have always been political critics of mass incarceration as it developed, including grassroots movements of militant Black people, there has been no sustained mass resistance to the mass incarceration policies. Why is this so? Well, for one thing, incarcerated people mostly have committed some sort of crime, so they are stigmatized and do not necessarily attract a lot of sympathy from other people. For another, incarcerated people themselves are subject to an extremely high level of repression. They are obviously under tight control when incarcerated, but they are also under tight control and supervision after incarceration. Former inmates are under the supervision of a parole officer for a period that varies from state to state and in many cases is essentially indefinite and can last ten years or more. While under supervision, a person must keep his parole officer apprised of his activities and whereabouts. The conditions of parole typically include restrictions against gathering with other felons without supervision or participating in any kind of political activity. Former inmates who violate the conditions of their supervision can be revoked to prison with only minimal legal proceedings. Mass incarceration also stresses the families and communities from which the inmates have been removed, reducing the resources available for political mobilization.

Immigrants are another group who are subject to a high level of political repression. New immigrants to the United States are not allowed to vote until they have completed an arduous series of waiting periods and bureaucratic hurdles to become citizens. “Illegal” immigrants to most countries are at constant risk of being detained and deported. In some places and times, cultural or ethnic minorities have been subject to language or religious repression, to banning of their distinctive clothing or jewelry, or to exceptional levels of scrutiny in airports or other public places.

One of the major empirical patterns in Black incarceration in the US is that Black incarceration rates and especially the Black/White disparity in incarceration rates are lower in the areas with a higher percent Black. To the surprise of many sociologists who imagine that racial discrimination problems are primarily limited to the South, this means that the Black/White disparity is actually lowest in the Southern states with large Black populations and is highest in Northern liberal states. This pattern is not an artifact of urbanization: it replicates for urban areas as well. Although some people are puzzled by the pattern, it is really very easy to understand from a political social control point of view. Incarceration is expensive.

Places that have a large proportion of Black people simply cannot afford to incarcerate as high a percentage of them. By contrast, a place with only a few Black people can afford to incarcerate all of them if it is so inclined. In addition to a simple cost calculus, there is the matter of democratic politics. Where Black people can vote and have some impact on the polity, they are in a better position to push back against policies that are excessively racially targeted.

Minorities and the Problem of Backlash

It seems obvious that the reason minorities are often successfully repressed is precisely because they are minorities who lack the resources to resist. But this fairly obvious point can be fed back into the general theory of political repression, which has too often run aground in its failure to consider the nature of the group being repressed in assessing the prospects for backlash.

Let's take as a given that people who, themselves, experience repression rarely exit the experience with greater appreciation for the legitimacy of the regime. The backlash question is whether the repression is approved of by the larger society of people who did not themselves commit acts of dissent, or whether people who are not themselves dissenters see the repression as illegitimate and thus reduce their support for the regime because of that repression. The general problematic of backlash to repression is that repression on the one hand reduces the prospects for mobilization directly by making dissent more costly or by making action by incapacitating dissenters but on the other hand increases grievance and thus the motivation to dissent. Most discussions of this problem have obscured its dynamics by treating "society" as a coherent entity and the regime either as outside society and repressing it (in the case of theories of political repression) or as the agent of society repressing outside "criminals" (in the case of crime control theory). But, in fact, the same "society" approves of some repression (of people defined as criminals or terrorists) and disapproves of other repression (of people defined as "ordinary people"). Repression is generally viewed as legitimate if its targets are violent or otherwise hurt or inconvenience many people, are viewed as extremists or outsiders, and have few ties to the community and if the repression itself is narrowly targeted on the dissenters and is in proportion to the dissent. On the opposite extreme, repression of dissent is likely to provoke backlash if the dissenters are peaceful, if the dissent inconveniences only its targets, if the dissenters are ordinary people with strong network ties to the broader society, and if the repression is an overreaction to the character of the dissent and targets a broader population than just the people who dissented. Moreover, it is reasonable to expect that the same act of repression by the state may well be viewed as legitimate by some segments of society and as illegitimate by others, depending on who the dissenters are in relation to cleavages and divisions in the society.

The core of the argument is thus obvious; repression of minorities is often approved of by majority groups, while repression of majorities is more likely to provoke backlash. The central question is the relation between the dissenters or repression targets and the larger society. One common issue in the study of race and ethnicity is the racial/ethnic character of the regime itself. In many times and places, the regime is the executive committee of one ethnic/racial group that runs the coercive apparatus of the state to maintain its dominance. There is a substantial literature in criminology about the ethnic character of policing and about the role of police in race riots, where it is well established that

sometimes the police are on one side of an ethnic conflict and, when they are, they become part of the apparatus of ethnic/racial domination.

To sum up, you cannot correctly analyze repression and backlash without attention to the divisions within society. It is simply a theoretical error to talk about the dynamics of repression as being only about the relation between the regime and the movement. One must always know who the people in the movement are relative to the rest of the society. Further, repression is always uneven. Weaker groups are much more likely to be repressed than stronger groups, racial/ethnic minorities are much more likely to experience repression than racial/ethnic majorities, and a regime is much less likely to experience backlash from repressing a minority group than from repressing a majority.

Ethnicity as the Network Integration Dimension of Social Movements

In this section of the paper, I want to treat ethnicity as network integration. My arguments in this section developed in dialogue with Morris and Braine's work on oppositional cultures. They criticize prior theorists for assuming that "all movements confront basically similar tasks and operate out the same internal logic." Instead, they argue that attention must be paid to structures of dominance and subordination. Their own focus is specifically on the problem of developing oppositional consciousness and their central argument is that movements by people in entrenched subordinate communities are different from movements around chosen issues and identities. Entrenched subordinate groups develop cultures that intertwine themes of acceptance and resignation (cultures of subordination) with themes of resistance and critique (cultures of opposition). All entrenched subordinate groups have cultures of opposition, but bringing these to a fully blown oppositional consciousness to motivate collective action requires overcoming the culture of subordination. By contrast, movements that are not tied to entrenched structures of domination involve the problem of persuading people to agree with the issue. Morris and Braine argue that there are three types of movements: (1) Liberation movements, whose carriers have a historically subordinate position within an ongoing system of social stratification and whose members are primarily members of the oppressed group whose membership is externally imposed (ascribed) and are typically physically segregated. (2) Equality-based special issue movements that address issues primarily affecting oppressed groups who draw on liberation ideologies to address the more specific issue. (3) Social responsibility movements that address conditions affecting the general population, whose members chose whether to identify with the group.

My thinking builds directly on their arguments about the huge difference between movements of oppressed peoples and social responsibility movements but unpacks their argument and refines it. Specifically I believe that they incorrectly lump together all structures of domination and treat ethnic/racial or class subordination as similar to gender, sexual minority or disability subordination. My argument is that each of these axes of domination/subordination has a different pattern on what I will call the "ethnic axis." Morris and Braine treat ascription or non-voluntary group membership as the central axis of differentiation, but mention a variety of other characteristics of structures of domination including oppression and subordination, distinctive group cultures and physical segregation. My argument begins by distinguishing the "vertical" dimension of oppression and subordination from the "horizontal" dimension of physical segregation and the creation of distinct cultures and then cycles back

to the matter of ascription and, specifically, the social construction of socially-salient ascribed characteristics.

Following Morris and Braine, I use the term “movement carrier” rather loosely to refer to the stratum or segment of society from which the activists in a movement are drawn. This is different from the “social movement community” concept as it is usually defined to refer to the loose network of activists a movement draws from (e.g. Taylor and Whittier 1992, Buecheler 1993, Stoecker 1995). However, there are many common casual usages of the term “the community” that are closer to the idea of a movement carrier, as when people speak of “the Black community” or the “LGBTQQ community.” As my argument unfolds, the idea of a movement carrier will gain more specificity as it will be linked to the observable social network characteristics of movement supporters in relation to the broader society they draw from.

Networks and Interests

Social policies affect people differently, depending on their social location. People have class interests around economic policies like tax systems, labor regulations, wages and welfare programs that are tied to their economic and occupational positions. They have linguistic interests tied to the dominance of their mother tongue and the ability to communicate easily with those around them. They have cultural interests tied to the ready accommodation to their preferred lifeways and ritual calendars. They have status or prestige interests about the social honor or respect accorded tied to the various social groups they are members of.

In addition to interests tied to the individual characteristics of people, there are interests that derive from the relations people have to each other. There are spatial interests: regardless of their individual characteristics, people who live near each other share common consequences from environmental pollutants, crime, local services, weather and other factors that affect places.¹ And finally, there are interests derived from indirect or network effects. This last set of interests is often ignored in social policy and social movement theory, but is central to my argument. These indirect effects through social networks are material, emotional and cognitive. The “social capital” concept recognizes that individuals are affected by the wealth or poverty and knowledge of the people they are socially connected to, not just their own. But these effects are not just material. Individuals respond emotionally to crimes committed against people they know, to the grief of people they know, to the hardships of people they know. And their perceptions of reality and the circumstances of “typical” people are similarly shaped by the people they know. These emotional and cognitive effects affect the group identities and perceptions of grievance that are central to much social movement theory, alongside the enduring importance of material interests. The clear bottom line is that for predicting how a person views a given social issue, it is not enough to know that individual’s personal characteristics but also essential to know the characteristics of the people that person is linked to spatially or socially.

¹ There are typically interactions between individual characteristics and spatial effects so that a spatial interest generally does not affect everyone in the area in the same way, but this does not change the basic point that there is some common spatial effect.

We can capture the force of this argument with a series of figures. [[DECIDE HOW MUCH OF THIS TO INCLUDE. slides]] Figure X1 [slide 34] presents a schematic contrast of the impact of a policy affecting “low class” people depending on whether “low class” and “high class” people are spatially/socially intermixed with “middle class” people or are highly segregated from each other. In each case, the indirect effects are encompassed by a circle around a “low class” person. In the integrated case, most of the social space experiences indirect effects of the policy, and high class people are sometimes within the circle of impact. But when low class people are segregated into one corner of the space and high class people into another, no high class people and only a minority of middle class people experience the indirect effects of a policy focused on low class people. Extreme patterns of social-spatial segregation lead to situations like that sketched in slide 35, where policies impacting low class people have almost no impact on even middle class people, much less high class people.

This is a network expression of the important sociological idea of cross-cutting versus reinforcing social cleavages. NOTE: A quick search reveals that this concept is alive and well in political science and the study of ethnic conflict and ethnic voting, lots of recent citations. Sociological citations are not popping up so readily. There’s a Diani paper I found on Dan Myers’ web site that is good.
<http://www.nd.edu/~dmyers/cbsm/vol2/ejst.pdf>

Social Networks and Movement Carriers: Cross-Cutting and Reinforcing Cleavages

Not all axes of dominance and subordination are the same. One core argument of this paper is that network structure is central to understanding movement dynamics. It matters whether subordinates are socially intermixed with or socially segregated from dominants. Slides 39 and 40 illustrate the point that gender and sexual orientation are cross-cutting with respect to class and ethnicity. There are women and men of all classes and ethnic/racial groups and there are people of all sexual orientations in all classes and racial/ethnic groups and there is essentially no correlation between gender or sexual orientation and either class or race/ethnicity. By contrast, race/ethnicity is a major basis of social-spatial segregation in the United States and is also highly correlated with class; slide 41 heuristically portrays this situation. This means that gender and sexual orientation are profoundly different as axes of domination than race/ethnicity. This is not a matter of empty debates about a “hierarchy of oppression” but about the network structure of relations between people along multiple dimensions.

Where does economic class fall in this scheme? In the United States, there is both class heterogeneity within all nearly all ethnic/racial groups (depending on how narrowly ethnicity is defined) and substantial differences between ethnic/racial groups in the central tendency and dispersion of these distributions. Recent research suggests that the spatial residential segregation of economic groups within ethnic/racial groups may be as high as or higher than the spatial residential segregation of ethnic/racial groups within economic groups. What is less clear is how deeply these patterns of residential segregation map social segregation. Mary Patillo [CHECK] reported that most middle class Blacks had poor relatives who made economic and personal demands and them, [[NEED THE RESEARCH ON SOCIAL CAPITAL OF PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT RACES & CLASSES]]

The importance of the extent to which different dimensions cross-cut or reinforce each other is well recognized as a central feature of comparative ethnic-racial relations and is well-recognized in modern political science theories of public opinion. Its decline from the view of “mainstream” sociology and social movement theory is lamentable and it is time to bring this important insight back into the center of social movement theory. However, much of the political science and ethnic conflict literature examines cross-cutting solely at the individual level and not at the level of social networks. At the network level, the matter of cross-cutting ties is whether people are related to or close friends with or coworkers with or neighbors of people from other groups.

The Ethnic/Racial Network Position of Movement Carriers

There has been significant research mapping the networks of relations among movement organizations and movement activists, but less attention has been paid to understanding the network position in society of the movement carriers, the population from which movement participants are drawn. As slide 43 sketches heuristically, different social movements draw from different segments of society as they are defined by social networks. Some draw from only one network clique in society, while others draw from multiple cliques. Some draw from only one race/ethnic-class segment of society, and others are multi-race/ethnic or multi-class. Of course, other network dimensions not illustrated here are also relevant. Some are geographically bounded, others draw from multiple locations. Some draw from only one insular social group, others draw more broadly from many networks. We will return to other network dimensions later.

The “ethnic dimension” of social movements is a horizontal or network dimension of social relationships. Ethnicity/race matters for social movements if and when it functions as a network cliquing structure that tends to affect the factors that are important for movement formation. That is, ethnicity/race as network cliquing matters if and when it

- creates both shared fate within a group and a lack of common interests between groups,
- fosters conflicts of interest between groups,
- fosters subcultural divergence between groups,
- promotes common identities within groups and contrasting identities between them, and
- promotes common understandings of reality and common frames within groups and different understandings and frames between groups.

Groups that are relatively socially isolated from other groups tend to both have distinctive interests and to develop distinctive cultures and views of the world. Groups that are socially isolated and culturally distinct tend to misunderstand each other and view each other with suspicion or hostility. Network cliquing and ethnic/racial group differentiation makes it difficult for people to work together across these boundaries even when they have other interests or axes of domination/subordination in common. Network cliquing and ethnic/racial group differentiation also, of course, provides the social structural underpinnings for movements and conflicts organized around ethnic/racial differences. This horizontal dimension of network connection between groups is different from the vertical dimension of dominance and social hierarchy although, obviously, there are connections between them. These connections will be discussed in a later section of the paper.

An Ethnic Typology of Social Movements

Just as all people have a gender and all people have a race, all social movements have an ethnicity. That is, all social movements have an ethnic/racial make-up and that ethnic/racial make-up is a critically important feature of a social movement that shapes everything about it. All social movements are either internally homogeneous or they are internally heterogeneous; it matters either way. All social movements are either dominated by a majority ethnics, dominated by a minority ethnics, or are ethnically mixed. All movements either have extensive network ties to the broader society, or are insular and isolated. All movement discourses are either relatively central to or relatively peripheral to mainstream discourses. All movement participants either identify with dominant social groups or they do not. It is impossible to do good theorizing about social movements without theorizing their ethnic dimension. Unfortunately, too much theorizing has ignored this dimension and has attempted to draw inferences about social movements in general from one narrow type of movement.

A full treatment of this issue requires recognizing that ethnic networks and ethnic group relations are embedded in different regimes which vary in their ethnic character. My discussion in this section focuses on regimes which are democratically elected under principles of majority rule and have some disadvantaged or discriminated ethnic/racial minorities. The United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and most or all European nations fall into this category. I would expect different relationships in regimes that are dictatorships or that are ruled by ethnic minorities that disenfranchise the majority. I would also expect different relationships in democratic regimes that are characterized by a majority ethnics that is politically dominant and a minority ethnics that is economically dominant.

Within the scope set by regimes that are democratically elected under the principles of majority rule and having a majority ethnics that is politically and economically relatively advantaged, there are three basic types of movements: ethnic majority, ethnic minority, and cross-ethnic, with the latter category requiring further subdivisions as we go.

Ethnic Majority Movements

Ethnic majority movements are movements that are empirically overwhelmingly dominated by ethnic majorities. Ethnic majority movements tend to be in the most advantageous position for mobilization. Ethnic majorities draw on larger pools of potential participants and resources; they have the numbers to exert electoral influence or power; they are much less likely to be repressed and are more likely to generate sympathetic backlash from the rest of society if they are repressed. Empirically, there are six basic types of ethnic majority movements from the point of view of an ethnic typology:

1. Anti-minority movements that seek to create or maintain ethnic majority dominance over other groups
2. Movements that address axes of domination within the majority (i.e. gender, sexual orientation, class)
3. Movements that address general social issues that affect the whole society (i.e. environment, peace)
4. Movements that address cultural or moral issues within the majority (i.e. religious or moral reform movements)

5. Movements that address particular local issues
6. Pro-minority ally movements supporting disadvantaged ethnic groups

People typically become members of majority movements by choice, not ascription, although as this paper progresses, we will return to the “ethnic dimension” of movements among majorities with a lens that suggests that subcultures might have an ascription-like character.

Empirically, majority movements often generate problems from the point of view of minorities. Majority movements whose purpose is ethnic domination are obviously common and obviously a problem for minorities. In addition, historical majority movements focused on axes of domination such as class or sex within the majority have often been explicitly anti-minority in their political practice. The dominant wing of the [White] women’s movement in the United States had become explicitly racist in its rhetoric by 1900 and [White] labor movements often opposed immigration and engaged in violence against ethnic/racial minorities, seeing them as competitors rather than fellow workers. Even those majority movements that do not explicitly turn against minorities most often define their issues in ways that minorities claim ignores their viewpoints or concerns. Ignoring the majority-ness of majority movements and both their advantages in mobilization and the ways in which they generate direct or indirect problems for minorities puts severe limitations on understanding movement dynamics and outcomes.

Ethnic Minority Movements

Ethnic minority movements are movements that are empirically dominated by ethnic minorities. Ethnic minorities are often discriminated against and economically disadvantaged, although not all are. Even if they are not disadvantaged, their sheer minorityness typically gives them little power in an electoral democracy, although they may sometimes have power as swing votes or in certain local areas where they are a majority. Historically, ethnic minorities have often been politically disenfranchised. Ethnic minorities typically lack sufficient resources and political power to achieve their goals without allies from the majority group, and this is especially so if the minority is disadvantaged. This need for outside allies is one theoretically important way in which minority movements diverge from majority movements. Movements by ethnic/racial minorities are empirically subject to higher rates of repression than majority movements and are empirically less likely to gain the support of widespread backlash when they are repressed. As Morris and Braine argued, minorities that are disadvantaged, and especially those that have been subject to overt repression and oppression, typically develop subcultures that intermingle themes of subordination and opposition. The awareness of group identity and a sense of grievance and opposition are typically givens, but so are fear of the consequences of resistance and customs and rituals of subordination, acquiescence and compliance.

Just as movements may be empirically dominated by ethnic majorities without the “issue” being ethnicity, movements may be empirically dominated by ethnic minorities without being framed as ethnic. A substantial amount of work in the academic study of ethnic conflict is precisely concerned with the circumstances under which issues and movements become framed as ethnic. Movements that are framed as ethnic minority movements include civil rights movements, national liberation or secessionist movements. They also include “intersectional” movements that explicitly link race or ethnicity to a social responsibility issue like peace or the environment or non-ethnic division like gender or class.

In addition to movements that explicitly define or frame themselves as ethnic minority movements, there are movements that define themselves as class-based or place-based movements that are empirically peopled by ethnic minorities. There are also movements by and for particularly oppressed groups of people who are disproportionately minority, such as felons or illegal migrants. Groups that are empirically peopled by disadvantaged minorities have most of the characteristics of minority movements whether or not they frame their movement in ethnic terms. That is, they tend to be weaker in resources, have fewer social ties to the broader majority-dominant society, and are vulnerable to repression.

It is important to stress that, analytically, the problems of minority movements are both vertical and horizontal. That is, they typically lack sufficient resources for mobilization, the numbers to give them political clout in elections, and the ties to the broader ethnic majority to give them influence.

Mixed Movements

Some movements are empirically mixed in their ethnic/racial composition. Some are peopled primarily by ethnic majorities but have substantial minority participation, while other movements are peopled primarily by ethnic minorities. Some groups are dominated by one ethnicity but reach out to incorporate others, some are formed as coalitions between groups representing different ethnicities, and some are drawn from constituencies that are multi-ethnic. Some multi-ethnic groups combined professionalized advocates who are disproportionately of majority ethnicity with disadvantaged beneficiary adherents who are primarily of minority ethnicity; this is the configuration that dominates the racial disparities movement that I have been working in.

It is well recognized among activists that it can be very difficult for culturally-different groups to work together, especially if there are also different levels of privilege and disadvantage that are correlated with ethnic differences. In practice it is often difficult to hold such groups together and they are typically marked by tensions along the ethnic divide. These lines of tension include privilege, hierarchy and power, cultural practices, and agendas. Problems of privilege plague movements that seek to bridge the privileged and the disadvantaged. Some of these gaps are material and practical, including access to telephones, email, copiers, computers, cars, travel money, days off, and discretionary time. Some are tied to levels of education and knowledge. Some are tied to the unconscious internalization of social hierarchies. People from privileged backgrounds typically have habits of domination and skills of self-assurance and confidence in talking and writing, while people from disadvantaged backgrounds may have been trained in submission. Privileged people are often uncomfortable when disadvantaged people are assertive and claim authority and want to do things their own way. These practical and interactional differences plague all groups that seek to work together across lines of privilege.

The privilege issues merge into the hierarchy and power issues. Privileged people typically have more access to outside sources of power and are more likely to be viewed as knowledgeable and objective by outsiders. The privileged are more often in control of an organization's purse strings due to being seen as more legitimate in the eyes of funders, and they are more likely to be gate-keepers for jobs or benefits needed by less advantaged group members. The privileged are also much less likely to be repressed for their actions, while disadvantaged members often have genuine reason to fear repression.

These hierarchy and power issues are especially acute in professionalized organizations, or organizations with outside funding.

Even when issues of privilege and hierarchy are not acute, different ethnic groups may have difficulty working together because of cultural issues tied to the fact that network cliquing gives them different expectations about what it means to “do” collective action. This is obvious whenever groups speak different languages, but it comes up whenever people’s background and experiences are markedly different. Groups from different networks may have had different experiences that give them radically different view of “reality.” These lead to different group identities and different ways of talking about and framing issues. In addition, cultural groups vary in the practices that undergird collective action. They have different ways of holding discussions and structuring meetings and different understandings about the proper forms of action. One especially important difference is that ethnic groups vary markedly in the ways in which disagreement is expressed. In some ethnic groups, overt and challenging statements of disagreement and confrontational language are the norm, while in other ethnic groups, any overt expression of disagreement is taboo and all communications must be made under norms of ritual politeness and circumlocution. Of course, even this simple contrast is too simple to capture the huge variability in the cultural practices around having conversations and making decisions. People from different backgrounds who are not aware of these cultural differences can infuriate each other in meetings and can find it nearly impossible to work together.

Finally, there are agenda issues when groups work together. People from different backgrounds will often have divergent goals. There can be internal conflicts over the allocation of resources within a movement, such as access to paid positions for dispersion of funds to different work groups. There are often conflicts over leadership. In addition, the mixing of conscience constituents and beneficiary constituents inevitably raises concerns about shared fate. Who will suffer the consequences if things go wrong? Are the conscience constituents really in for the long haul, or will they leave when things go sour or they don’t get their way?

Summing Up: Ethnicity and Social Movements

This section of the paper has argued that the ethnic/racial composition of a social movement is one of its central defining characteristics that shapes everything about it from its prospects for mobilization, the likelihood that it will be repressed, its chances for success, the strategy and tactics it can pursue, its framing of issues, and its internal dynamics. It matters whether the movement is integrated with or segregated from the larger population. It matters whether the movement is homogeneous or heterogeneous in its ethnic composition. Theories that do not address these issues are not general theories at all, and any theory that does not address the ethnic dimension explicitly should be interrogated for what implicit assumptions it is making about movement ethnicity.

I developed the argument for the importance of ethnicity as a “network” factor, as being about the extent to which one group has network ties with other groups in society, and the extent to which a social movement draws from only one network in society or from multiple networks. This is the ethnic dimension of social movements. In the next section of the paper, I shift from ethnicity as a dimension to analyzing the dimensions of ethnicity

Theorizing the Three Dimensions of Ethnicity

To this point, I have treated ethnicity as a network dimension of social movements, how the movement carrier is or is not tied to the different sectors of the larger society. In this section, I want to develop the idea of ethnicity as having three types of dimensions, not only horizontal but also vertical and temporal. These dimensions harken back to Morris and Braine's discussion of structures of domination and ascribed characteristics. This more abstract way of thinking about ethnicity opens the door, in the last section of the paper, to bringing the idea of ethnicity to bear on group divisions that are not normally thought of as ethnic. Although I am developing these ideas as a three-dimensional space, it will be clear as the argument progresses that each of these dimensions is, itself, multi-dimensional, so that really we are talking about an n-dimensional understanding of ethnicity, where n remains undetermined. But I do think thinking about the three main types of dimensions will provide a solid foundation for understanding what is important about the ethnic dimensions in movements. I have already discussed the network dimension, so this section develops the vertical and temporal dimensions and the ways they are mutually reinforcing.

The Vertical Dimensions

The vertical or hierarchical dimensions of ethnicity are the ones that give some ethnic groups more power or privilege or status than others. These vertical dimensions are both material and cultural/social. This list is not exhaustive but I believe captures the range of vertical issues to consider.

- **Numbers**, how large a group is
- **Resources** such as land or wealth or control over means of production
- **Political power**, the control of government and the coercive apparatus of the state
- **Day-to-day restrictions on life**, including physical separation or ghettoization, exclusion from some occupations or activities or places, surveillance requirements
- **Enforced ignorance**, bans on literacy, restrictions on education
- **Symbolic dominance**, including rituals of submission and other practices that reinforce definitions of groups as superior or inferior
- **Cultural dominance**, either suppression of language or cultural practices or its opposite, the enforced separation of language or culture

These vertical dimensions are the underpinnings of structures of domination. They are the factors that affect whether one group can maintain itself in a superior position with respect to other groups. It is important to recognize that these vertical dimensions apply to groups that are not "ethnic." In particular, many of these dimensions are found in gender hierarchies or class hierarchies. Similarly, ethnic groups may vary in the extent to which they have other structures of domination within them or the extent to which other structures of domination cross-cut ethnicity.

These vertical dimensions of domination can affect the horizontal dimension of network ties. Day-to-day restrictions on life, rules of segregation and exclusion, differential access to resources, enforced ignorance and rituals of symbolic or cultural dominance can all contribute to physical or social separation between people in different groups. Populations experiencing enforced segregation do tend

to develop distinct subcultures and to have few ties to the larger society. Rituals of domination that prohibit inferiors from speaking to or contradicting superiors can create social boundaries that block communication and create different worlds of experience. Alternately, assimilationist cultural dominance can destroy a group's separate identity if it is accompanied by integrationist policies that lead to genuine social mixing.

We may consider structures of domination to be the vertical dimension of "ethnicity" to the extent that these structures do lead to spatial or social segregation and the formation of cliqued networks.

The Temporal Dimension: Intergenerational Transmission

In this section, I begin with a relatively simplistic review of what makes a group an ethnic group. Ethnicity/race is by definition intergenerational and ascribed: you are born with it, you inherit it from your parents, and you are acculturated into it through childhood socialization. The human population has been constantly differentiating and mixing throughout history. Ethnicities/races are constantly changing as people move around. Ethnicities/races remain distinct if and only if they are physically or socially segregated and do not intermarry (or interbreed) and produce mixed offspring. If groups are not in physical contact with each other, it is unproblematic that they remain separate. But if groups are in physical proximity to each other, the maintenance of ethnic/racial distinctions is always problematic. For there to be ethnic or racial groups living in proximity to each other, there must be processes generating group boundaries that are preventing mixing and leading to the reproducing of ethnicity across generations; these group boundaries and the inter-generational inheritance of ethnicity lead in turn to distinctive cultures that tend to reinforce the group boundaries that hinder inter-marriage. Slide 76 illustrates this. Scholars of race and ethnicity emphasize that this process of boundary-formation and boundary-maintenance is always mutable and contested and that groups are always defined in relation to other groups. Ethnic groups are always blending and fractionating and being defined and re-defined in interaction with other groups.

In the long arm of history, the origin of ethnicity is human migration and the physical separation of populations that led to distinct languages and cultures. Relatively isolated populations can generate distinctive dialects languages as quickly as within one generation, and language/dialect differences are often the most important marker of difference between groups. Early human history appears often to have involved the migration of relatively small groups into new territories and the struggles between groups for control of particular terrain. Even modern recorded history gives many examples of the formation of new ethnicities by the migration of people from one place to another, as when the English settlers in America ethnically diverged from the English in England or the Dutch settlers in South Africa became the Afrikaans.

However and however long ago they diverged, "ethnic conflict" arises when distinct groups come into contact with each other through migration, including both voluntary migration and involuntary, invasive, or coercive migration. When initially-distinct ethnic groups come into contact with one another and there are no social barriers between them, they may mix and become one combined ethnicity. Sometimes groups are forced to assimilate or merge by external political or coercive force, as when Africans of various ethnicities were forced to merge into African-Americans under the conditions of

slavery. Scholars of ethnicity stress that there are many “rules” about how this may happen. Sometimes the children of the mixture are defined as mixed, sometimes mixed-descent people are defined as members of only one of the groups, and there can be many complex customs and rules about the definitions and boundaries as people mix. But in the long haul across multiple generations, if people keep intermarrying, the product will in one way or another be the regrouping and redefinition of ethnic boundaries.

Sometimes the project of the majority in a structure of domination is forced cultural assimilation and the erasure of cultural boundaries that maintain ethnicity across generations. Depending on context, this can be seen as benign or malignant. In a context of voluntary migration, in which minorities have chosen to move to a new country, forced cultural assimilation when accompanied by social integration is typically viewed relatively benignly as “immigrant incorporation.” In contexts of territorial conquest and forced relocation, forced cultural assimilation and the erasure of cultural boundaries is often been called “cultural genocide,” especially when linked to coercive repression and high death rates.

In other contexts, ethnicities in living in proximity to each other to remain distinct across generations. When this happens, there are almost always strong cultural or political barriers to mixing. Groups with low intermarriage rates typically are physically and socially segregated within a society. There may be laws against intermarriage. Cultural barriers may include religious or language divisions that lead groups to re-create themselves in each generation. The offspring of “mixed” pairs may be defined as belonging to only one group.

There are also many historical cases in which groups that have been gradually merging through a process of voluntary intermarriage are suddenly re-created in a process of ethnic conflict that forces people to choose sides and punishes boundary-crossers.

The points of this brief exegesis are three. First, ethnicity/race inherently involves the temporal dimension of intergenerational transmission. Group differences that are not maintained across generations are, by definition, not ethnic. Second, these group boundaries are constantly in flux across generations and are constantly being created and recreated. They are never fixed, they are always socially constructed. Third, the vertical, horizontal and temporal dimensions of ethnicity reinforce each other. Structures of domination and cultural differences tend to promote network cliquing and promote in-group marriage and the reproduction of ethnicity across generations. Low rates of inter-marriage and the temporal maintenance of ethnicity tend to reproduce network cleavage and cultural difference and to feed into structures of domination.

The Ethnic Dimensions as Analytic Tools

This paper began as a project to add an “ethnic dimension” to the study of social movements, to pay attention to issues of network integration alongside those of hierarchy and domination, and to the relation between them. Deeper analysis of ethnicity on its own terms revealed the central importance of the temporal dimension of intergenerational transmission. The intergenerational component is central to social movements. Many lines of research have revealed how families and communities maintain

intergenerational cultures of resistance that undergird long-term social movements around major social cleavages. At the same time, other social movements are less clearly intergenerational. The most obvious case would seem to be the gay/lesbian movement, as most gays and lesbians are offspring of heterosexual parents. Other movements grow up around more transitory issues such as a particular war or environmental threat and do not seem to be embedded in ongoing communities.

Breaking away from ethnicity-as-ethnicity, we may ask whether the analytic tools used to understand the importance of ethnicity are also useful for understanding movements and movement carriers that are not ethnic in the usual understanding of the term.

Class

Social/economic class is not generally thought of as an ethnicity, but there are obvious ethnic dimensions to class structures. On the one hand, class is often correlated with ethnicity due to processes of conquest or differential migration. On the other, ethnic divisions within a class, particularly within the working class, often disrupt the possibility for collective action along class lines, and working class movements by ethnic majorities have often taken the turn of attacking ethnic minorities, particularly if employers have sought to use minorities as lower-paid workers or strikebreakers.

Even in a society that is ethnically relatively homogeneous, class differences often take on an ethnic character. If different classes have distinct cultures and do not intermarry, class has an ethnic dimension. Social historians have pointed to rates of intermarriage by class as markers of the rigidity or openness of a class structure. We would predict that relatively closed class structures with low inter-class mobility and low inter-class marriage would foster more distinctly different class cultures and separated social networks that, in turn, would mean that class has a more ethnic character in a more closed stratification system.

Sex, Gender, Sexual Orientation

Sex is obviously not an ethnicity, as people have parents of both sexes and the sexes typically occupy the same households. Sex cross-cuts ethnicity. However, gender systems can be at least partially understood in the analytic terms we have constructed for ethnicity. Manifestly, gender systems vary in the vertical dimensions and the extent to which they create male-female hierarchies. To the extent that a gender system promotes sex-segregated social life and gender-specific subcultures, there is an horizontal ethnic component to gender. The horizontal or network dimensions point us to attending to the structure of women's relations both to men and to other women. In some relatively segregated gender systems, women interact freely with other women, even if not with men, sometimes only within class/ethnic boundaries, and other times across them. In other gender systems, women are kept isolated within family units and have few network ties to anyone. Mothers and daughters (or fathers and sons) are in a position to transmit culture across generations, so one may also see sex-ethnic group cultures or identities.

Sexual minorities are also not ethnicities, but the ethnic dimensions may illuminate their dynamics. If sexual minorities form distinctive social networks and subcultures, this may take on an ethnic character.

In general, however, because people who are sexual minorities typically have sexual majority parents, we would not expect to see the intergenerational transmission of these cultures and movements.

Intergenerational Transmission Revisited

I have argued that intergenerational transmission is defining of ethnicity and that intergenerational transmission from parents to children is why “ethnic” movements are different from other movements. But saying this then opens the door to considering the matter of intergenerational transmission of movement cultures by means other than parent-child relations. Looking outside social movements, there are other means of inter-generational transmission besides parent-child. Children’s games, creole languages and street dialects, and other elements of youth culture are known to be transmitted directly from older children to younger children without adult intervention. Thus it is meaningful to get out of the family unit and ask about the extent to which movements transmit their culture across generations. To the extent that they do, there may be an “ethnic” dimension to the movements. I do not propose to develop this theme in this paper, but I see it as a valuable avenue to pursue.

Beyond this, we may cycle back to parent-child relations, because movement activists are disproportionately likely to come from activist families that socialize their children into activism and movement participation. If these activist families are scattered about society and do not form distinctive network clusters, this phenomenon is not ethnic-group formation in the traditional sense, although it is certainly worth monitoring in social movements studies. But the intergenerational transmission of movement participation is not typically randomly distributed across space. People of distinct political ideologies often cluster in particular neighborhoods and do form distinctive social networks. When this happens, we are seeing a phenomenon that begins to look like an ethnic group. If people become endogamous by politics, it begins to look even more like an ethnic group.

Politics as Ethnic Dimensions?

To think of the core of ethnicity as relatively cliqued social networks that foster distinct in-group identities and solidary and foster and universes of discourse with different assumptions about what is real, different values, and different uses of language and symbols is to raise the possibility that any cliqued social network may have an ethnic dimension. There is growing evidence in the US that there are distinct secular-liberal and religious-conservative universes of discourse among White Americans. These distinct networks show up in studies of blogs and book purchases and can also be identified by hanging out in different communities. Although there are some families and communities in which people from different ends of this polarization are still in contact with each other, there are many communities and families that are predominantly one or the other. Even where people of different views occupy the same space, they sometimes have little social contact with each other, if they organize their lives around politically-homogeneous churches or social networks. Some religious groups and some extremist or sectarian political groups may fall into these categories, in addition to the liberal and conservative communities. To the extent that the people who support a particular movement come from a relatively cliqued social network, and especially to the extent that holding the opinions that support the movement is grounded in a worldview that is transmitted across generations, it may be useful to think of these groups as proto-ethnic and consider the extent to which the ethnic dimensions apply to them.

Summary and Implications

I have argued that different movement carriers are in different ethnic-structural locations that affect everything about them: mobilization processes, choices of strategy and tactics, core framing tasks and consciousness raising, the likelihood of repression, and the ability to influence the larger society. The three groups of ethnic dimensions are the vertical dimension of structures of domination, the horizontal dimension of network ties and network cleavages and the temporal dimension of intergenerational transmission. These three dimensions are the analytic tools for characterizing the social location of any group. Any theory of social movements needs to pay attention to these dimensions as part of its analysis.

Not all types of movement carriers are equally likely to need to or to be able to generate social movements and collective action. Ethnic majorities typically have the numbers, resources, electoral clout and network ties that facilitate mobilization, enhance the chances of success, and reduce the chances of repression. Advantaged majorities may not need movement mobilization at all if they are able to satisfy their desires through ordinary individual or political channels. If they are opposed by other members of the ethnic majority who have differing political views, we may see the development of movement-counter movement pairs, with each side able to gain adherents and influence, and neither side subject to excessive repression.

By contrast, ethnic minorities are often in situations that hinder movement success. On the plus side, network cleavages may give them the internal network ties and associated sense of identity and solidarity to facilitate collective action. But on the negative side, ethnic minorities are more easily repressed and the very structures of domination that oppress them may enforce habits of subordination as well as reduce the resources and network ties that would provide a basis for achieving their goals.

This implies that both advantaged and disadvantaged groups may not produce social movements. Studying only the movements that exist is the classic selection bias problem. A way out of this is to examine the theoretical space of movement carriers in society and the axes of domination and ask which sectors of society produce movements, and which do not.

Finally, it seems to me that bringing the expanded idea of the “ethnic” into social movements theory provides tools for answering Andrew Walder’s challenge about explaining the content of movements. Walder reviews and critiques social movement research for narrowing its focus to the problem of mobilization and ignoring the problem of content. As Walder’s review acknowledges, older class-centric or deprivation theories that tried to explain movement content were generally unsatisfactory. One of the paradoxes we know is that people who seem to be in objectively the same material condition often embrace wildly different political and movement ideologies. This is the problem of “unexplained” ideological divergence. In the United States today we can observe that White Americans in roughly the same socio-economic circumstances are embracing divergent ideologies. We also know that non-“interest” factors, particularly religious affiliation and geographic location, are strong predictors of this divergence in opinions.

We who study social movements have some theoretical tools for making sense of these patterns. People of different ideological views are in different networks: they live in different neighborhoods, participate in different secular or religious organizations, and read or watch different information sources. They live in radically different universes of discourse. Movements mostly recruit from populations or movement carriers that support the general world-view of the movement, and concentrate on activating and extending the basic values and opinions of the movement carrier. Further, a common response to encountering people who are talking from a different or unfamiliar universe of discourse tends to produce outrage and polarization, not influence. There is evidence that people form ethnic-like identities that are associated with their political opinions, and that group identity and reactions against outsiders help to fuel support for or affiliation with movements.

This approach does not immediately answer the questions of movement content, but it does point toward a strategy for answering it. It says that we cannot expect to read movement content directly from an individual's personal circumstances, but from the larger network of affiliations in which people are embedded. These larger networks of affiliations affect what ideas they are exposed to and how they react to new ideas. People are making sense of the world they live in, but they do so in a socially-defined context in which some things are taken as unquestionably true or real and polarization develops when they are aware of others who are actively supporting different views.

To sum up, we find that starting with taking seriously the difference between ethnic majorities and ethnic minorities in their prospects for mobilization and seeking to identify the theoretical dimensions of ethnicity and how they influence social movements leads us to a new set of ways of looking at the core problems of meaning-making and the construction of movement identities.